

VZCZCXRO3845
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHGO #1123/01 2201115
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 081115Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4934
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1048
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0058
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9820
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0273
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4277
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1739
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3467
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0462
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6917
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4533
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0855
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0858
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0556
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2803
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0446
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001123

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: STUDENT ACTIVISTS COMMEMORATE THE 1988 UPRISING

RANGOON 00001123 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Over 500 democracy activists and supporters gathered in Rangoon on August 8, the 17th anniversary of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, to commemorate their fallen comrades in a religious ceremony held at Thaikpan Monastery in Rangoon. The event, organized by the 88 Generation Students movement led by Min Ko Naing and Ko Ko Gyi, was the first of its kind held inside Burma. In reaction to the date's significance, the regime tightened security at Rangoon high schools, around Shwedagon Pagoda, and on University Avenue, where ASSK remains under house arrest. Under the watchful eyes of the regime, Min Ko Naing and his fellow activists used the anniversary to stage a gathering of the splintered opposition that rarely works together. We see this as another step forward in response to those who want to see a more active opposition movement inside the country. End summary.

12. (C) On August 8, over 500 democracy activists gathered at Thaikpan Monastery in Rangoon to commemorate the 17th anniversary of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. The event was the first of its kind since the 1988 uprising and was organized by the "88 Generation Students" led by former political prisoner Min Ko Naing. Many fellow former prisoners and student activists participated, as did NLD members from Rangoon, Mandalay, and other cities; leaders of Chin, Kachin, Shan, and Arakanese ethnic groups; and members of the Group of Veteran Politicians. Others attending the event included recently released political prisoners Su Su Nwe and Aye Myint; noted Burmese economist U Myint; Soe Myint, who delivers ASSK's food and is one of only two people to see her everyday; and prominent actor Kyaw Thu, who helps

fund funerals for former political prisoners. Diplomats from the German, British, South Korean and U.S. embassies attended the morning ceremonies. While a few NLD leaders attended, one young NLD member lamented that more of the leadership did not attend, and expressed the wish that the NLD would organize similar events.

¶3. (C) The ceremony was originally to be held at Maggin Monastery in Rangoon, long known for its support of student activists and headed by the recently deceased Maggin Sayadaw, himself a former political prisoner. However, due to regime pressure on the monastery to disassociate itself from the students, the students were forced to hold the event at an alternate site. The head Abbott of Thaikpan Monastery agreed to host. Nervous that he would be persuaded to change his mind, a member of the 88 Generation Students group visited him every day for a week prior to the event to ensure arrangements. Guests began arriving on August 8 before 8 a.m. and at precisely 8:08, fourteen monks led a 30-minute religious ceremony in honor of democracy activists killed during the 1988 uprising.

¶4. (C) In anticipation of the anniversary of the pro-democracy uprising, the regime tightened security around ASSK's residence, local schools, marketplaces, and bus stops. University Avenue was closed to cars and pedestrians. Approximately 25 plainclothes security personnel kept watch over the 88 Generation Students' ceremony. One of them asked a student if they would share food from the ceremony with them as well, and she replied that they would if they had any left over. She then asked her colleagues save some for the watchers. Other than taking ample pictures of attendees, security personnel did not interfere and kept a lower profile than at NLD events.

¶4. (C) Notably, Burma's most important religious site,

RANGOON 00001123 002.2 OF 002

Shwedagon Pagoda, was closed to the general public the morning of the 8th until 12 noon. Burmese authorities claimed that Thai military chief, Ruangroj Mahasaranon, might visit the site, so it had been closed as a security precaution. Others suggested that its closure had more to do with the 8.8.88 anniversary and the regime's fear that 88 Generation Students would stage a march from the nearby Thaikpan Monastery to Shwedagon. Embassies witnessed USDA members, dressed in their trademark white shirts and green longyis, stationed around Shwedagon's South Gate denying access to the general public. While access to Shwedagon Pagoda is normally restricted when there are VIP guests, the use of USDA members and the length of time it was closed indicated official concern about the significant date.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Min Ko Naing told us that he and other student leaders planned this event to give an outlet to those who want to see a more active opposition movement within Burma. This includes student activists, supporters of the students not affiliated with any group, and NLD members unsatisfied with the cautious "caretaker" approach NLD leadership has taken while ASSK remains under house arrest. Significantly, several people who are not directly involved in political activities and usually wish to remain in the background chose to attend the ceremony today as well. The event provided a rare opportunity for members of Burma's splintered political opposition to come together. It also showed that Min Ko Naing and other student leaders are willing to step forward to help revive and unite the political opposition. End comment.
VILLAROSA